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ABSTRACT

A study of randomly selected "Donahue" shows revealed how host Phil Donahue interacts with several parties at one time and how he subordinates various interactions to suit the hierarchy of importance he attributes to each party, with the television viewer being the most important. Donahue organizes his body movement mainly for television viewers. Even when talking with his visitors, the studio audience, and the telephone callers, he faces and leans toward the viewers and uses compensating head and trunk twisting movements to maintain contact with them. Donahue's face is quite expressive, and he is particularly adept at raising his eyebrows and maintaining eye contact. He gesticulates with an almost Latin frequency, but the range and direction of his movements are within the Anglo tradition. He is also an expert at shrugging his shoulders, pointing, and waving. He uses the way he holds the microphone as a turn taking signal for his audience, and he is quite skillful in his use of proxemics to increase intimacy with one party while maintaining contact with another. He runs to his visitors and guests, comes close but does not invade their private space, rarely touches women (a slight tap on the shoulder), and never touches men. He generally dresses in a light blue suit, but does not make any use of clothing or ornaments. (Actual photos of Donahue in action accompany the paper.) (JL)

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Tenth World Congress of Sociology

Mexico City, August 16-21, 1982

Sociolinguistics Section (RF25)

Sub-Section 4: Basic Phenomena of Verbal and Nonverbal Interaction

Main Session

Walburga von Raffler-Engel (Vanderbilt University, U.S.A.)

The coordination of verbal and nonverbal interaction towards three parties; the analysis of a talk show.

INTRODUCTION

Working on this project has confirmed my basic contention that before one starts even the pilot study in researching non-verbal communication, it is necessary to spend a considerable amount of time simply watching what goes on. Even if one has worked for decades in the field and keeps up with the literature, one cannot anticipate what the research needs will be when one begins a new project in an area that has not been previously explored. A neat research design emerges only after weeks of open-ended observation.

Four years ago I decided to study the performance of Phil Donahue for a strictly utilitarian reason. I wanted to find out how the actor succeeded in keeping the full involvement (which is more than stimulating interest) of the public viewing his show on television while he was interacting with his special visitor, or visitors, and his studio audience, and while he was

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also answering telephone calls from the outside. I had hoped that Phil Donahue could serve me as a model to improve my own classroom performance. I find it rather difficult to engage in a lively conversation with one particular student who asks a question or wants to discuss an appropriate comment of his without my either losing the class as a whole or cutting the individual student shorter than he actually deserves. The answer to whether my study of Mr. Donahue has helped me in overcoming this predicament is clearly in the negative. After viewing only a dozen or so of the Phil Donahue shows and taking ample notes I thought that the actor behaved exactly as predicted by Scheflen (1969:327) using different parts of his body as visible links to each of the three parties concerned. But going on and recording some twenty more shows I discovered that there is a fundamental difference between ordinary or artistic behavior destined for the naked eye and artistic behavior designated for a television audience.

When ordinary behavior is recorded on film or video tape, the recording has very little, if any effect on the patterning of said behavior. When the knowledge of being recorded influences the subjects, their behavior is altered in three possible ways. Subjects may become self-conscious and intimidated,under-gesticulating even to the point of freezing. Or self-consciousness may push subjects to over-gesticulate. Children in particular tend to become hams. An extension of the latter is a tendency for subjects to intersperse their ordinary behavior with extraneous movements destined exclusively for the camera. The presence of a recording device

distorts but does not fundamentally alter the interactional process in which the subjects are engaging. The recording device is a passive instrument and not an integral part of the ongoing process. A silent, note taking anthropologist or a filming ethologist may inhibit the performance of a tribal rite but does not necessarily become an active participant in that rite. In a television show the camera operator, even though unseen by the audience, is an integral part of the performance and the part he takes in the event in most instances has been firmly established before the show. Phil Donahue counts on his operators, and in this sense interacts with them throughout the show. Thus, there are not four parties with whom Donahue interacts but five: the visitor(s), the studio audience, the telephone callers, the television viewers, and the camera crew.

In a research project which I completed in 1980 with a student of mine I was able to document that the perception of the same movements by a single individual and of an individual seen in the dyad differs in statistically significant fashion (von Raffler-Engel and McKnight 1982). Donahue may be intuitively or experientially aware of this fact. When he knows that he appears alone on the screen he behaves differently from when he appears with his overt interactant(s). This is probably the main reason why the camera cuts off everyone else when Donahue communicates with only the television viewers. What possible cues exist between Donahue and the camera operator(s) I do not know. I have watched for indices but was unable to detect any.

The relationship of the five parties is clearly hierarchic. Donahue's main objective is the television viewer and the camera is strictly in function of that party. His interaction with the visitor(s) is admittedly engaged in for the sake of the television viewers but Donahue also wants to make a good impression on his guest(s) while he has no such concern for the cameramen. He also cares for the appreciation of the studio audience while his response to the telephone callers seems more exclusively geared to the viewers than to the person that makes the call.

In this paper I shall try to show how Phil Donahue interacts with more than one party at the same time and how he subordinates the various interactions to suit the hierarchy of importance which, according to my judgment, he attributes to each party. At first I identified this hierarchy a prioristically with an intuitive criterion given my knowledge of the culture. But eventually I was able to justify this hierarchical scheme from the structured arrangement of the body motions themselves. The internal pattern confirmed the external variables.

A total of ten (10) shows were randomly selected for statistical analysis, the only criterion for their selection being the goodness of reception on that day in Nashville, Tennessee, and the time constraints of the technician at the Vanderbilt University Learning Resource Center in recording the show on our own video cassettes from the regular public transmission on WSMV-TV (NBC) from 9:00 to 10:00 A.M. during the spring and summer of 1982. I am deeply grateful to Dr.

Penny Pierce, director of the Learning Resource Center for her offer to record all of fifty shows at her home where the reception was clearer than at the University.

At the writing of this paper the statistics are not fully completed and I will limit myself to a small number of statistics from a single talk show to reveal the pattern which underlies them all. Robin Foster assisted with the statistical calculations. Time was measured in seconds with a Panasonic tape timer. The program which furnished the preliminary statistics was aired Tuesday, July 6, 1982.

THE PHIL DONAHUE SHOW

For those readers that are not familiar with the Phil Donahue Talk Show I shall briefly describe this program which is aired in the U.S.A. nationwide on weekday mornings following the morning news on the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) television channel and is seen by millions of Americans. The program has enjoyed high ratings for many years and its dynamic host has been written up in popular magazines like Newsweek (1979). Many shows feature the author, or authors, of controversial or highly relevant subjects, such as how to overcome the trauma of incest and rape, or how a woman can plan ahead before she leaves an unfaithful or violence-prone husband. One show featured our own specialist in nonverbal behavior, Ashley Montagu. Some shows present prominent public figures like Gloria Steinem of the Women's Movement, or famous athletes,

singers, or other popular figures. The majority of viewers at 9 o'clock in the morning are college students, the elderly, and women who have part-time jobs or are housewives. Most shows are sponsored by a publishing house or a foundation.

The show itself takes place in a large hall in various cities in the United States. In the front part of the hall, on the left side (rarely on the right side) is a bench or a line of chairs to seat the visitors of the day. Less frequently there is a table seating the visitors and Donahue himself. The back of the hall is formed like an amphitheater with sloping seats holding approximately one hundred persons who form the studio audience. These persons come primarily from the city in which the show takes place on that day and are mostly, but not exclusively, middle class with at least some years of college education. The age spectrum is very broad. About 80% of the audience are women and there are approximately 5% of black people, also mostly women.

At the beginning of the talk show, its host Phil Donahue introduces the visitors who then start talking. Donahue discusses some of their viewpoints and eventually people from the studio audience participate in the discussions. Generally, about 10% of the studio audience becomes actively involved. At the same time telephone lines are open and people from all over the country start calling in. The telephone is not visible but the voice of the caller is heard loud and clear. Donahue answers these telephone calls and frequently people from the studio audience intervene to offer their own comments.

The talk show lasts exactly one hour including the customary interruptions by commercials every fifteen minutes or so. Once the time taken up by the commercials is discounted, the actual show lasts 51 minutes. At the onset of the program one sees only the Donahue logo and no credits are rolled at the beginning of the show but at the end of the program the address of the sponsor appears on the screen and shortly again the logo. When these times (6 minutes) are subtracted, the real show time is reduced to 45 minutes.

ANALYSIS

The intuitive perception that the talk show is geared mainly to the television viewers is statistically validated when one researches how Phil Donahue organizes his body motions. Of a total 16.23 minutes that Donahue is visible on the screen, he is alone 10.0 minutes which amounts to 61.63% of the time.

Postural Orientation

The total screen exposure of Donahue lasts 16.23 minutes. Of these he faces the viewer frontally 10.95 minutes which amounts to 67.56% of the time. His shoulders are fully horizontal at a 90° angle from the two sides of the screen.

When Donahue is speaking with his visitors he frequently leans forward towards them which happens to be also the direction of the viewers. When doing so, his head is slightly tilted in the direction of the viewers which is quite natural within the guest-interaction but also shows his profile more distinctly at the advantage of the viewers. In some instances he even leans full front towards the viewers. Precisely, Donahue spends 6.23

minutes with his guests which amounts to 15.5% of his total time on the screen. Of these 6.23 minutes, he leans forward towards the guests 2.5 minutes amounting to 40.3% of his total time with visitors. The total time he leans forward towards the viewers is 23 seconds amounting to 6.15% of his time with guests. There is a ratio of 1:3 of his leaning towards the guests and his leaning towards the viewers. In regard to the latter, from looking at changes in the background I was able to detect that at certain moments it was not Donahue that changed position away from the visitors (which would have been impolite) but that the camera operated at another angle so that Donahue appeared to face the audience again.

Originally, Donahue's contact with the viewers was established through both his head and his trunk position. When he abandons the head position in favor of the new interactant, he compensates by adding a further dimension to his original contact with the viewers, reducing the apparent distance to a more intimate level by leaning forward either fully and overtly towards the viewers (in the less frequent instances) or by leaning forward in the direction of the new interactant but at the same time imperceptively also towards the viewers. Eventually, the camera turns away from Donahue altogether showing only the visitor(s) and/or the studio audience. In this way the viewers never feel that their host is no longer giving them his undivided attention. When he is seated at a table together with his visitors, rather than accommodating his guests on a bench, Donahue sits opposite them and thus is viewed on the screen seated sidewise. In

this position his profile shows and he is never fully out of contact with the television viewers.

When the telephone calls come in, it is clear from the acoustics from what direction the caller's voice stems, or rather where the telephone is located albeit the latter is invisible. If it were visible it might look strange that Donahue does not pick up the receiver and this would create a further complication enforcing Donahue's movements away from the viewers. Donahue points in the direction of the telephone as if to show it to the viewers thus involving them in the communication. Donahue now has to handle three parties, the viewers, the telephone caller, and the studio audience. He handles this situation very skillfully. At first he turns and twists his body asking "Is the caller there?" or "Where is the caller?". This allows him to face the viewers briefly during his body twisting. The invisibility of the telephone coupled with the loud volume of the caller's voice make it unnecessary for Donahue to fully turn in that direction. The hierarchy of his commitment to the interacting parties is as follows: viewers, studio audience, telephone caller. He combines the studio audience and the telephone caller by walking sidewise towards the audience and pointing towards the telephone location with his extended arm, obviously for the benefit of the audience. His body remains in this position which is equally a side-by-side position towards the viewers. But very quickly he turns his head facing the viewers directly. Again, in a multi-party situation, he utilizes the head and the trunk in different positions. The principle is always the

same, only the details vary. While in the earlier multi-party interaction with the viewers and the visitors, the trunk favored the viewers, this time it is the head. Soon the camera shuts off Donahue focusing on the studio audience.

When Donahue addresses the studio audience as a group, he may point to it for the sake of the viewers at large while he is facing these viewers with the studio audience behind his back facing him. He sometimes turns around to a full 360° turn so that the viewers see only his back. These are the rare instances in which the viewershave full access to the entire studio audience and one gets the feeling that Donahue stands there to facilitate such complete visible access for his viewers. He never speaks while in the back position as this would imply that he is interacting with somebody while disconnecting his interaction with the viewers. The back position does not last long as the camera very quickly turns away from Donahue. In a total back exposure of 2.0 minutes there were 31 such occurrences which reduce each back exposure to a medium of 3.87 seconds. This amount of time would be even less if one discounted an atypical instance where Donahue holds the microphone and which lasts 19 seconds. When next he reappears on the screen he faces the viewers.

When Donahue interacts with an individual from the studio audience, he runs towards the person in the audience who starts talking and waves his hand towards him/her, in a manner similar to when he indicates the direction of the telephone. Before he shifts his body to the side in order to run to the right or to the left (mostly to the left) he smiles towards

the viewers. As one cannot very well run with one's head turned in another direction from one's feet, the camera soon cuts off Donahue and focuses on the speaker from the audience. When focusing again on Donahue during the conversational exchange, he is seen ostensibly manipulating the microphone between the speaker and himself. He does not simply transfer the microphone between himself and the speaker but during the transfer occasionally holds it still in mid air while looking at the viewers, as if to show them the microphone so that they are made to feel part of the ongoing interaction.

Towards the end of the show, or whenever Donahue exhibits the book which is being discussed and whose authors are present at the show, Donahue remains in the frontal position towards the viewers. He may either hold the book open in front of his chest or hold it up in the air with his arm. Sometimes he is seated and sometimes he is standing but always in frontal position towards the viewers.

Head movements

Donahue's head movements are finely coordinated with his posture. When he is talking exclusively with his television viewers head and trunk are synchronized in the same direction. To animate the interaction, the head may move to the sides but rarely moves up and down. It is when Donahue interacts with another party that he dyssynchronizes the movements of the various parts of his body. Donahue's main concern are the television viewers and one part of his body remains engaged with them. In some instances the trunk remains stationary while the

head changes direction towards the second interactant. In other instances the head remains constant with the primary interactant, the viewers, while the trunk shifts in the direction of the second interactant.

Facial mimicry

Donahue, like most actors, is rich in facial mimicry. The most pronounced facial expression is one of dismay when a speaker has said something shocking. Donahue turns full face to the viewers when producing this grimace. It is like a comment directed towards the viewers who are thus constantly reminded that he is with them all the time even though he has been officially engaged in some dyadic interaction. At times Donahue himself makes an inappropriate, or downright silly, remark and recognizes this immediately by putting on a contrite expression, again directed at the television viewers. Some of his grimaces are designed to solicit laughter from the studio audience. But it seems that what he really has in mind when he says things like "Walking in their bathing suits and on high heels" with a comical expression is the entertainment of the viewers because the camera shows his full face in frontal position. I have not devoted much time to study his facial movements because they seem to hold a lesser part in the organization of the multi-party interaction which is the focus of my research. Donahue has a characteristic way of raising his eyebrows which draws attention to his eyes which are directed to the viewers.

Eye gaze

Eye contact is the most important feature in interactional

maintenance. When Donahue turns his head away from the viewers he never cuts off eye contact at the moment when the head turn starts but intensifies eye contact right before the turn and keeps it as long as possible without becoming cockeyed.

Gesticulation

Donahue gesticulates with an almost Latin frequency but range and direction of movement are within the Anglo tradition. His arms do not extend on the sides beyond a 30° angle from the body if they extend on the sides at all. Virtually all movements are up and down strokes between the neck and navel and occur when he is seated. When standing his gesticulation is limited largely to the outstretched arm in the position normal for waving and pointing.

His most salient illustrator is the pointing gesture when he indicates to the viewers that there is someone who wants to talk, and consequently will have to be answered. An important baton which ties him together with the viewers occurs when he is seated with his elbows close to the body and his forearms stretch forwards at a 45° angle, palms wide open.

A characteristic emblem of Donahue's is a slight shrug of the shoulder while pointing to an imaginary cameraman when it is time to interrupt the show for the commercial. Another typical emblem is his hand waving at the end of the show. With it goes a jovial facial expression which gives the goodbye waving a note of cordiality and hope to meet again the next day.

As my students Louise Durfee and Nancy Heller observed when we studied the Phil Donahue show in 1979, adaptors are extremely rare (He may adjust his glasses). The actor is in full control of himself. When he scratches his head, ne does so on purpose and not because of nervousness.

Turn taking signals

Donahue has a very clear turn taking signal when he hands the microphone to a potential speaker and when he takes it away from the latter to use it himself. My two students,Louise Durfee and Nancy Heller, observed that when Donahue is speaking he keeps the mike close to his mouth and holds the microphone with his hand at the bottom. Before actually putting the microphone to the mouth of his interlocutor, he signals the speaking turn to the latter by tilting the microphone away from his mouth. He then lets it slip down through his hands until the head of the mike touches his hand. As observed earlier in this paper, it is likely that Donahue gives such an elaborate turn taking signal so that the viewers have time to fixate the microphone and become involved in the conversational exchange as conscious observers rather than strangers to that dyad.

Proxemics

The most skillful use of proxemics can be observed when Donahue bends forward to increase intimacy with the viewers at the crucial point when he has to devote much of his attention to a second participant. He runs to his prospective speakers rather than walk towards,them to hand them the microphone.

He could easily have an attendant do this or, like in some of his earlier shows, have the speaker go up and approach a fixed microphone. Donahue's run gives a feel of urgency to the meeting of the speaker with him and also makes certain that Donahue remains visibly in control of the situation. The speaker from the studio audience does not have the floor to himself in front of the viewers and his flow of speech can be terminated by transferring the microphone to someone else. It may be relevant to notice here that his logo DONAHUE appears on the screen in a horizontal, a slanted and a vertical position. It is either stationary or has moveable letters. In the latter case, when it is in the slanted and vertical position, the letters glitter. When it is in the horizontal position, the letters look like they are running against a background of a city or a landscape. One is reminded of the studio audience and Donahue running in front of it.

Donahue never invades anybody's private space. He usually stands at the level of close personal distance. In the rare instances that he moves into the intimate distance he does this only in the less sensitive back of an individual or on his/her side and does so with women only. As Donahue is constantly concerned with the viewers' perspective he takes up mostly the side-by-side position.

The visitors are seated next to each other at the usual American interspace of slightly less than one foot. When Donahue sits at table with them he occupies the seat opposite his guests with extended distance, between himself on both sides. This gives him the head table position. Many times

he remains standing when talking with his visitors. In such cases, he sometimes bends forward towards the visitors during the conversation. Each visitor is equipped with a lavalier microphone around his/her neck.

Touch

Touch is infrequent and usually consists of a slight tap on a woman's shoulder. Or he may run his arm around the waist of a woman visitor. Men are never touched by Donahue.

Artifactual communication

Donahue generally dresses in a well tailored (but not business style) suit, light blue or white shirt and conservative tie. Male visitors are usually dressed in similar style, in gray or dark well tailored suits. Women visitors dress according to fashion and season, also on the conservative side but no haute couture. The studio audience is dressed in a great variety of styles, depending on the city.

Aside from the initial presentation of self, no use is made of clothing or adornments. Only once it seemed quite hot and Donahue encouraged his two male guests to take off their jackets.

CONCLUSION

There are two distinct elements in Donahue's patterning of his interaction with more than one party. He never loses touch with the viewers and utilizes the flexibility of his body to accomplish this. One part of the body remains in contact with the viewers while another part establishes contact with

the new interlocutor. The second element which Donahue utilizes for this purpose is the camera. His image is no longer carried on the screen when the situation requires that he loses all body contact with the viewers.

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Newsweek 94:76-94 (October 29)

I. Donohue Logo

II. 1. D. co-interacting with visitors and television viewers

II. 2. D. co-interacting with visitors and television viewers

III. D. co-interacting with telephone caller and television viewers

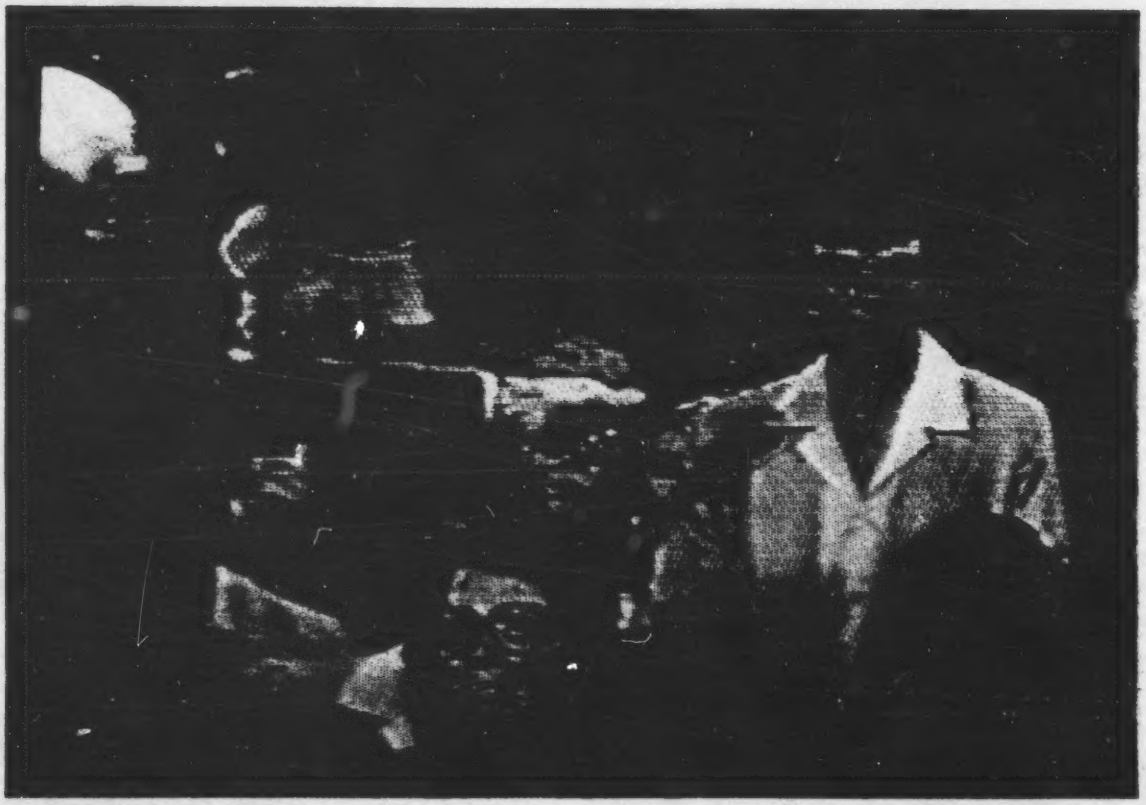
IV. 1. D. co-interacting with studio audience and television viewers

IV. 2. D. co-interacting with studio audience and television viewers

IV. 3. D. Co-interacting with studio audience and television viewers

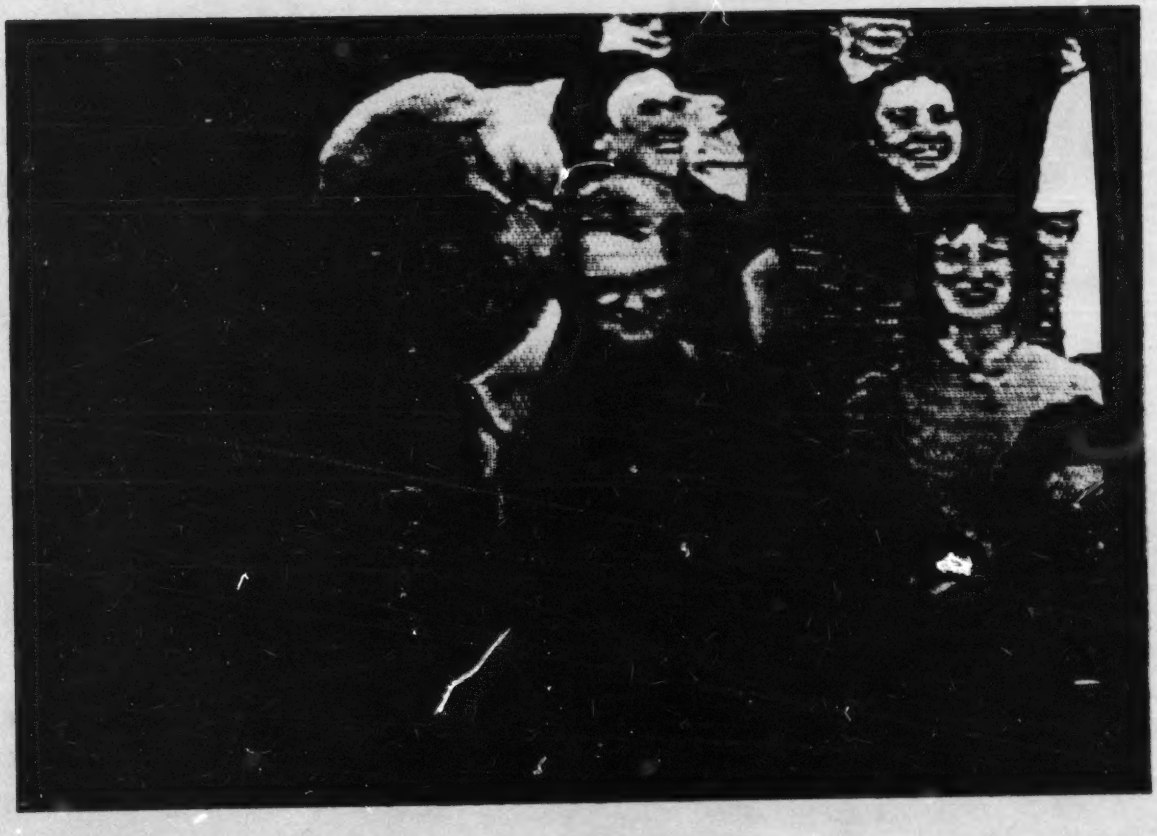
IV. 4. D. co-interacting with studio audience and television viewers

IV. 5. D. co-interacting with studio audience and television viewers

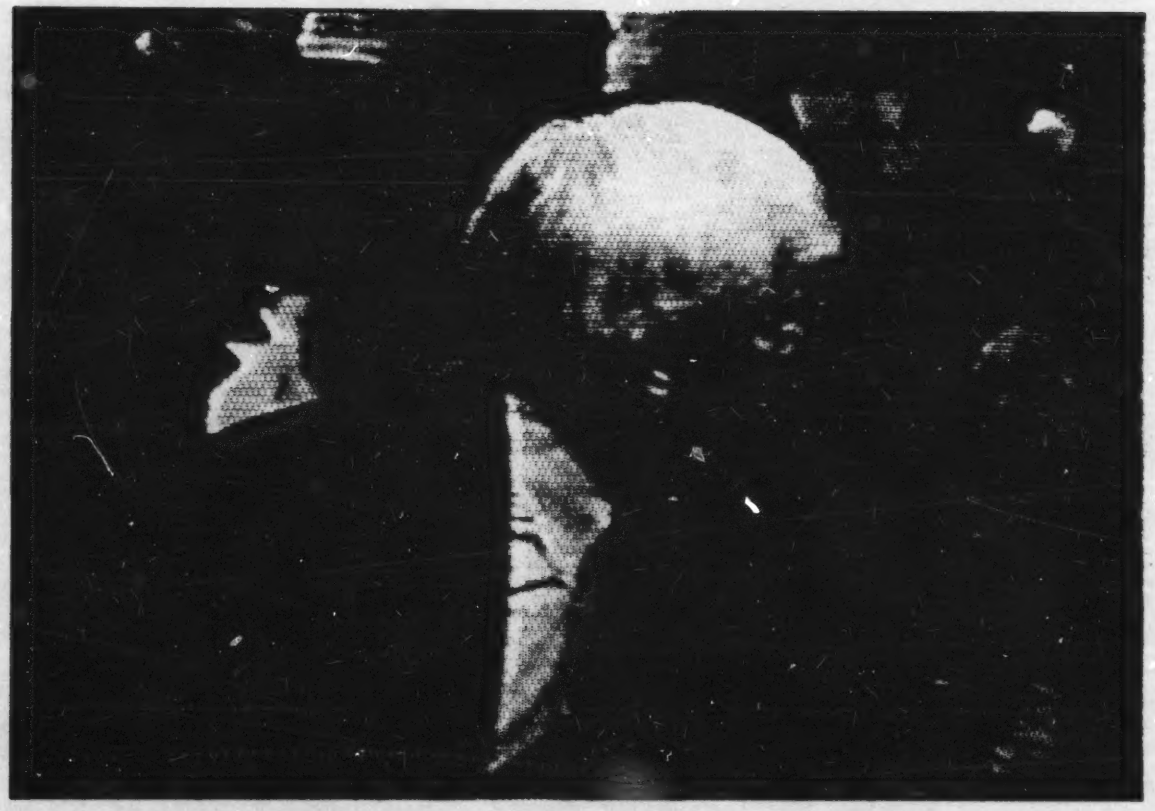


V. Head/trunk dyssynchrony

VI. Facial expression of contrition



VII. Eye contact with television viewers



VIII. Pointing gesture to involve television viewers